



Dave Killen /The Oregonian-OregonLive

Protests in downtown Portland on Aug. 25.

Governor Brown calls for end to violence

By Andrew Selsky
Associated Press

SALEM — With protests in Portland nearing the 100-day mark, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Thursday called for an end to violence even as federal agents were continuing to arrest protesters who allegedly assaulted law enforcement officers.

Protests have erupted daily in the Pacific Northwest city since the killing of George Floyd. They are now punctuated by clashes between Black Lives Matter demonstrators and far-right counter-protesters. One man who was a supporter of a far-right group called Patriot Prayer was shot dead last Saturday.

“The violence must stop,” Brown wrote. “There is no place for white supremacy or vigilantism in Oregon. All who perpetrate violent crimes must be held equally accountable.”

The statement does not single out the small minority of left-wing protesters who have been setting fires, vandalizing

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— Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

buildings and throwing objects at police. But Brown’s spokesman, Charles Boyle, said it “is a collective call to action for an end to violence in Portland and affirms that those who commit violent acts must be held accountable.”

Brown’s condemnation of violence was also signed by almost two-dozen state and local politicians, a host of organizations including the local NAACP chapter, and professional sports teams like the Trailblazers NBA team, the Timbers soccer team and the Thorns women’s soccer team.

Portland Police Chief Chuck Lovell has denounced protesters who broke windows and set a fire this week to a business in the upscale apartment building where Mayor

Ted Wheeler lives. Protesters are angry that Wheeler has not stopped officers from using batons and tear gas against Black Lives Matter protesters. Wheeler now reportedly plans to move out of the building.

Two people arrested by federal agents appeared in federal court on Thursday.

As of a week ago, 74 people were facing federal charges for crimes allegedly committed during demonstrations in Portland since at least May 29, U.S. Attorney Billy Williams said.

“Violent agitators have hijacked any semblance of First Amendment protected activity, engaging in violent criminal acts and destruction of public safety,” Williams said last week.



Two GOP candidates campaign in Baker City

By Jayson Jacoby
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Two Republican candidates hoping to accomplish what has become a rare feat for members of their party in Oregon brought their campaigns to Baker City Thursday evening.

Kim Thatcher, who is running for Oregon secretary of state, and Jeff Gudman, a candidate for state treasurer, spoke to a group of about 35 people at Geiser-Pollman Park.

The event was organized by Baker County Republicans.

Republican candidates have fared poorly in statewide elections over the past two decades, including races for state offices and for U.S. senator.

Since 2002, Dennis Richardson is the only Republican to win such a race, when he defeated Democrat Brad Avakian in the secretary of state’s race in November 2016.

Richardson died on Feb. 26, 2019, and Gov. Kate Brown appointed Bev Clarno, also a Republican, to replace him.

Thatcher, who has served in the Oregon Legislature since 2005, initially as a representative and currently as a senator, said in an interview prior to Thursday’s event that she doesn’t believe she has an advantage because both Clarno and Richardson are also Republicans.

Indeed, Thatcher, 55, who lives in Keizer, said she misses Richardson, a friend and former colleague in the Legislature.

Thatcher said she expected that it would Richardson’s name on the Nov. 3 ballot, seeking a second term as secretary of state, rather than her own.

Thatcher said she takes heart, though, by Richardson’s victory in 2016.

“Dennis showed it could be done, that people still do cross over in Oregon, and look at the candidate rather than the party,” she said.

In any case, Thatcher contends that the secretary of state is a “managerial” position and that the holder of the office has “what should be nonpartisan responsibilities.”

Those include serving as the state’s chief elections official, overseeing Oregon’s

audits division, and serving as administrator of public records.

In regard to elections, Oregon was the first state, in 1998, to have all elections by mail-in ballots. The topic has generated considerable publicity this year, as states look to limit in-person voting due to the coronavirus pandemic. President Donald Trump has expressed concern about the prospect for widespread election fraud.

Thatcher said she believes Oregon has avoided such problems with its vote-by-mail system.

“I think we do a pretty darn good job,” she said. “We have safeguards in place and we’ve worked on it for a long time.”

Thatcher said that as secretary of state she would ensure that the state remains vigilant in making sure Oregon voters can be confident in their electoral process.

As for public records, Thatcher believes the state has failed to uphold the purpose of the 1973 law, and made it too difficult for people to access public records to which they’re legally entitled.

Obstacles include the cost of having public officials review requested records for items that could be legally redacted, as well as just “foot-dragging” by agencies, Thatcher said.

She said that as secretary of state she would seek to make public records more readily available, in particular by posting them online.

Thatcher has been a member of the Transparency Oregon Advisory Commission, which deals with public records issues, since 2009.

Thatcher, who is a former co-chair of the Joint Legislative Committee on Audits, Information Management & Technology, said she strongly supports the secretary of state being aggressive in using the audits division to make sure state agencies are spending tax dollar wisely.

“They are very good at what they do,” she said of the state’s auditors.

Thatcher believes audits can be especially vital in the near future because the state will have to deal with a significant decline in tax revenue due to the economic effects of the pandemic.

Finding, and eliminating, wasteful spending is more crucial than ever, she said.



Thatcher



Gudman

Dog deaths investigation continues

Samples from dogs that died recently in Haines are being tested for poison, the Baker County Sheriff’s Office said Friday.

The Sheriff’s Office has confirmed that six dogs have died, all in Haines, according to a press release.

One resident reported that two of his dogs died between Aug. 27-29.

On Aug. 31 deputies responded to a call from a Haines resident whose dog was suffering from seizures. Deputies took the dog to the Animal Clinic in Baker City but the dog died en route.

The Sheriff’s Office also received reports that three other dogs died within a 24-hour period.

Deputies have been going door to door in Haines, talking to residents and asking dog owners to keep their pets contained in their yards and to watch for symptoms such as heavy panting or convulsions.

The Sheriff’s Office has been in contact with the Animal Investigation Unit at the Oregon Humane Society, and anyone with information about the incidents should call the county dispatch office at 541-523-6415.

BENEFITS

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The information about the smaller repayment came from the Baker Education Association, which represents teachers, said Michelle Glover, the District’s business manager.

Glover said District officials, who believe the overpayment resulted from ambiguous instructions on a state-provided form, are advocating for the state to not punish employees.

The situation affects teachers and other employees who work during the school year but not year-round, Glover said.

To ensure employees qualified for Oregon’s Work Share program, the District reduced their pay by the equivalent of one work day per week during May, equating to 25% given the usual 4-day school week.

While the state probably won’t seek immediate repayment, the employees could be required to repay the money before collecting any future unemployment benefits, Witty said.

In an email to the Herald, Witty wrote that the amount overpaid would be considered a balanced owed to the state, and that amount would be deducted from any future unemployment benefits to which district employees are entitled.

“It was a glitch in the way the contract is built and the

way Work Share was put into law,” he said.

Here’s the glitch: For the week of Memorial Day, the employees’ work week totaled 44 hours under their contracts — 36 hours of instruction time and eight hours of holiday pay, according to the email from Witty.

The Work Share program, however, does not pay benefits to employees who work more than 40 hours per week, the District learned when notified by the Employment Department on Aug. 25.

That information was not included on any forms or communication provided earlier to the District, Witty said.

“If we’d have known we wouldn’t have applied for that week,” he said.

The employer instructions for the weekly benefits includes this sentence: “Please indicate the employee’s customary work week (if other than 40 hours).”

In the email, Witty wrote that district officials, based on that instruction, weren’t aware that the customary work week couldn’t exceed 40 hours.

And although he says he recognizes the Employment Department has been swamped with a heavy workload and an unusually high volume of cases to handle during the pandemic,

Witty faults the department for paying the claims in the first place.

“They accepted it and paid it,” Witty said. “I wish they would have caught it right at the gate. That would have been great.”

Witty said the District will continue to advocate for a resolution to the problem for the benefit of its employees.

“I wish they would own the mistake and drive on, as opposed to trying to collect the money from people who’ve already spent it, essentially,” he said. “I am hopeful that in the next few days we can get it resolved and move on, but there are no guarantees.”

Although the employees’ work week was reduced by 25% in May, they did not suffer pay cuts because they became eligible for not only weekly state Work Share benefits, but also the weekly federal benefits included in the coronavirus relief bill.

The District expects to save about \$300,000 through its participation in the Work Share plan, and would push that savings into the next biennium when school budgets are expect to face heavy cuts because of declining state revenue resulting from the current recession, Witty said.

Jayson Jacoby of the Baker City Herald contributed to this story.

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